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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KPKO](#) [MARR](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [SY](#) [IT](#) [SP](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: DEFMIN MURR ON GOVERNMENT FORMATION

REF: A. BEIRUT 1021  
[1](#)B. BEIRUT 974

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri has no new strategy to form the government since his renomination on September 16, caretaker Defense Minister Elias Murr told the Ambassador September 23. Murr said he advised Hariri to make President Michel Sleiman a "real partner" in the government formation process and reported that Sleiman was willing and ready to play that role. Sleiman was hoping parliamentary Speaker Nabih Berri would support Sleiman should Hariri propose a cabinet that includes Shia participation, even if Berri's coalition ally Michel Aoun withdrew his bloc's participation. Murr said both he and Sleiman expect a government will be formed by November. In the meantime, Murr said security was his primary concern. Murr said Sleiman would request an extension of UNIFIL Commander General Claudio Graziano's term from UNSYG Ban Ki-moon during the UN General Assembly. If an extension is not possible, Murr advocates assigning a commander as tough as Graziano and convincing the Italian government not to reduce its UNIFIL contingent. Murr did not support a resumption of U.S.-Lebanon Joint Military Commission talks until after government formation and preferred the discussion take place in Washington, DC. He advised the U.S. maintain a low profile vis-a-vis the government formation process to avoid being criticized for interference in Lebanon's domestic politics. End summary.

"SAAD DOESN'T HAVE A PLAN"  
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[1](#)2. (C) PM-designate Hariri does not have a plan for moving forward with the government formation process, Murr told the Ambassador and poloff on September 23. He judged that "nothing new" has occurred since Hariri was re-nominated on September 16 (ref A). Although Murr characterized Druze leader Walid Jumblatt as being outside the coalition because he "does not trust March 14," he believed Jumblatt would not move closer to Hizballah and the opposition out of doubt that they would protect him in the event of a Sunni-Shia clash. Murr said he continues to advise Hariri to make President Sleiman his "real partner" and to not allow opposition Christian leader Michel Aoun to become the "Christian defender and Hizballah's front." Murr was hopeful that his father, independent MP Michel Murr, would capitalize on a

September 24 lunch with Hariri to encourage him to work more closely with Sleiman.

#### SLEIMAN SUPPORTS MARCH 14 BLOC

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13. (C) Although Hariri has no strategy, Murr said both he and Sleiman expect the government to be formed by November. Sleiman, whom Murr described as uncomfortable with the current political stalemate, reportedly told Murr that he was willing to assist Hariri in his task by offering to have the telecommunications ministry -- demanded by Aoun -- within his cabinet bloc. In a conversation with Murr a week ago, Sleiman had plainly stated his affinity for the March 14 coalition and disparaged Aoun and Hizballah by saying it was the "bastards and other bearded people" that he was concerned about, Murr claimed. Sleiman added, Murr alleged, that he had asked Shia Amal party head Nabih Berri for his support, even if under the table. If Berri agreed to help, Murr reported, Sleiman was prepared to accept any government that Hariri proposed, even if Aoun were to resign later since Sleiman argued that the government would still be representative as long as a whole sectarian group did not walk out, as the Shia did in 2006.

#### SECURITY WORRIES: ASSASSINATIONS, PALESTINIAN CAMPS

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14. (C) Murr said his primary concern was to maintain security in the current political environment. He expressed fear that an assassination attempt, an attack in a public venue, an increase in violence in the Palestinian refugee camps, or Sunni-Shia clashes could lead to wider conflict and destabilize the country. He was also concerned that Hizballah had created political cover for itself by publicly stating that it had no intention of urging its supporters to take to the streets. Murr assessed that Hizballah might co-opt another group -- perhaps one in the Palestinian camps -- to do its dirty work.

15. (C/NF) Murr reported that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) military intelligence indicated that Syria would not empower Sleiman to form a government, despite Sleiman's telephone calls to Syrian President Bashar al-Asad asking him to push his Lebanese allies to compromise. Murr said he was concerned that Syria would attempt to create some kind of security incident to destabilize Lebanon. Murr has ordered LAF Commander General Jean Kahwagi to have special forces and at least one brigade on standby to respond immediately to such an incident.

#### NEW UNIFIL COMMANDER SHOULD BE AT LEAST AS TOUGH AS GRAZIANO

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16. (C) Murr said that during the UNGA Sleiman planned to raise with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon the possibility of extending UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) Commander General Claudio Graziano's term. The GOL, Murr said, would like to have Graziano stay (ref B) but understands that UN regulations may preclude that. More importantly, Murr said, the new commander must be at least as tough as Graziano, committed to UNSCR 1701, and motivated. Although the GOL would not mind if the commander were another Italian or a Spaniard, its primary concern is maintaining the same number of UNIFIL soldiers, he said. Murr expected the Italian government to reach a decision in the next ten days on whether it would downsize its UNIFIL troop levels due to budgetary concerns. If Italy adopts a decision to reduce its troop levels, Murr requested U.S. assistance to intercede with the GOI and other troop contributing countries to argue against such a move.

#### NEXT JMC AFTER GOVERNMENT FORMATION

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17. (C) When asked his views of the next U.S.-Lebanon Joint

Military Commission (JMC) talks, Murr was adamant that it should occur only after formation of the government. He explained that it would be inefficient and unproductive to start the next talks without a government and public opinion would be more favorable if the dialogue were delayed. Murr said that the GOL prefers that the next JMC take place in Washington, DC, because holding it again in Beirut would not garner enough media coverage. Murr advised the U.S. to continue in its current low-profile posture with regard to government formation and to "be helpful in four weeks' time" after the cabinet is named.

18. (C) COMMENT: Murr maintains regular contact with both President Sleiman and Saad Hariri. His assessment that Hariri has no clearly defined strategy in the new round of parliamentary consultations coincides with assessments made by other political contacts.

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